

Snow White in the Sunshine by Rosy_el

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Summary:

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Snow White in the Sunshine

July, 1985

“Mike, *stop*,” Eleven’s breathing came out in gasps, hysteric giggles breaking up her oxygen flow. Mike’s fingers tickled her stomach and back and she pushed at his hands, desperate for air.

Mike laughed along; “Would you rather me tickle your feet?” He sat up and reached for her legs.

“Oh, no!” She scolded, slapping his hands in a final attempt to make him quit it. Mike rolled his eyes teasingly, smirk broad on his mouth, dropping his back onto the grass.

The sun beat down heavily overhead, scattered light dancing on their faces and exposed legs from in between the giant oak’s shadow that the pair laid underneath in Mike’s backyard. They had just gotten back from the lake, hair whipped dry by the wind they had ridden through on their bikes. Neither had access to a car yet, so that was still their primary source of transportation. El’s brown hair had dried in frizzy waves, her cheeks showing signs of the sun. Mike, on the other hand, turned no more golden. He just freckled. Dark spots lined the bridge of his nose and El found herself thinking about kissing his face even more than she normally did, which was *a lot*.

The two went back to nursing their popsicles; Mike’s grape and El’s cherry, dying her lips a deep red. Mike noticed.

“Mike,” a whisper. Mike turned his head, grape pop hanging lazily from his mouth. Eleven watched the leaves above as they tossed in the breeze. “I’m nervous about school.”

Mike blinked and studied her profile. She had a little mole on her neck, just above her collar bone. He sat in silence for a moment, thinking about what he should say.

“I don’t think I’ll be...” her voice trailed off and she licked a stray droplet of melted cherry ice from her knuckle. El sighed. “I don’t think I’ll be smart enough,” she admitted. Mike’s eyes shot to her

face.

“What?” He propped himself up on his elbow. “Are you kidding me?” El shrugged and kept her eyes stubbornly up. “El, you’re like the smartest person I know.”

She scoffed at that, shaking her head.

“El.” Eyes still chained to the greenery hanging overhead. “Look at me, El.” The corner of her mouth twitched before she looked pointedly at Mike, disdain and embarrassment clear on her face.

She had been back for seven months now. Hopper had hired Nancy for the little (but really not so little) side job of getting El caught up enough to enroll in public school that August. Since January, El would walk to the Wheeler’s house after Nancy got out of school and get tutoring sessions in everything from English and math to social studies and history. The sessions would be short; Nancy had a lot of her own schoolwork to tend to. But since summer, the pair had been hard at work from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Mike hated it. He’d try again and again to sneak down the basement stairs and make faces at El from the ledge behind Nancy’s back or beg Nancy to let Eleven have a break and come play with him and the boys. But Nancy was straight as a rail, banishing Mike from the basement. “*You’re too much of a distraction to El, Mike! Go away!*” He’d do the Mike Sigh and trudge back up the stairs angrily.

But El had this Friday off. Nancy was at a college tour further upstate so El was all his.

“El, you’re *so* smart and you’re going to do awesome in school!” His dark eyes were passionate and his grape popsicle was melting onto his fingers. Something about the way he said it made El believe him. *Friends don’t lie.*

But then again, Mike didn’t seem to be a *friend*—not exactly. Lucas and Dustin and Will didn’t make El’s chest burn the way Mike did when he tried to tame his hair in the mirror or slammed a Thessela Hydra onto the D&D table or when she caught him watching her, ebony eyes lit with a low fire.

"A *friend*?" El had asked that night almost two years ago in the Hawkins Middle School cafeteria.

"*Not a friend—a... a...*," Then Mike had done something that had lit El's chest ablaze. He had pushed his mouth onto hers, short but urgent, and it had felt like Eleven's heart beat restarted—like she had been walking around dead and that weird mouth-to-mouth *thing* had revived her all at once.

She knew what it was now. "*True love's kiss*," Holly noted, *Snow White* playing on the television screen one Thursday morning a few weeks ago that Nancy had slept through her alarm. El waited patiently for her in the basement with Holly, who was still dressed in her teddy bear onesie, blonde hair in a messy heap. The prince leaned over Snow and put his mouth on her mouth. Eleven's eyes widened. She jabbed a finger at the screen, looking to Holly for answers.

A kiss. No—*true love's kiss*. El still didn't know what any of that really meant but now she could at least label what had happened that night at the school.

So, they weren't friends. Studying Mike's black eyelashes cast shadows on his freckled cheekbones under the sunshine, Eleven realized she didn't *want* to be Mike Wheeler's friend. Not at all.

"You won't even need my help at school, but I'll probably be in a few of your classes anyway."

"Okay," El replied to Mike, turning her head to watch the leaves and clouds again.

"Hmph," Mike followed suit, mouth back on his purple ice pop. "You don't take much convincing."

Eleven smiled wickedly. "I just remembered how bad I beat you at Scrabble," she retorted sharply. Her sentences were rarely that long yet. Though Nancy's lessons were helping crack El's vocal shell, in a few months' time she'd be visiting the school's speech pathologist every other day, stretching her comfort in speaking abundantly.

El had picked up on everything weirdly fast, especially spelling and

written grammar. The spoken part still poised a challenge. She loved to read—immersing herself in the novels that lined Mike’s bookshelf and swallowing the boys’ comic collections nearly whole. She had *slaughtered* Mike at Scrabble. S-L-A-U-G-H-T-E-R-E-D. Mike was brilliant, that was no secret, with a mind that took on math and physics and chemistry and biology with the same ease in which Holly scribbled in her coloring books. But spelling was not his strong suit. Even Mike Wheeler had an academic weakness.

El giggled, absentmindedly reaching her fingers above her head to touch the rough bark covering the trunk of the oak tree beside them. “‘Accurate’ still doesn’t have a ‘Q’ in it, Mike.” She bit at her popsicle through laughter.

“Oh,” Mike blushed, reminded of that humiliating loss, “you think you’re funny, don’t you?”

El smiled. “I know I am.”

Mike’s mouth opened wide, surprised by El’s comeback. She had picked up quite a few wit tricks watching the boys interact with one another, but often found herself only comfortable enough with Mike to try them out. “Oh, okay,” a mischievous glint met Mike’s eye. “I know what could make you laugh harder.”

El lifted a single eyebrow.

“You had it coming,” he said before grabbing her feet, tickling them with grape-stained fingers. Eleven gasped and keeled over onto Mike—her head falling into his neck, bouncing from hysteric laughter on his shoulder. Mike blushed at her closeness, his fingers altogether stopping when he saw her swimsuit strap fall from her shoulder. Even that distracted him enough to freeze, eyes stuck to her exposed skin.

El followed his gaze, surprised at his sudden stopping, and gulped, pulling the strap back up quickly, her face even more pink than it had been before. Mike ripped his eyes away and scratched at his neck, now realizing what he had just done. He wanted to kick himself. No, he wanted to push himself off of the quarry.

“Uh, um—” he stumbled through the sounds, looking anywhere but

at El, who carefully watched him through golden eyelashes. She wasn't sure what had just happened, but it made her think back to *Snow White*. Kneeling on the ground, jean shorts and yellow swimsuit splattered in little drips of cherry popsicle, El found herself leaning forward slowly. Mike finally let his eyes meet hers again, feeling a pull to them strangely similar to gravity. Like El was the sun and Mike was stuck orbiting her—not that he was complaining.

Lips and faces flushed, they leaned together, like it was instinct to be this close. Mike felt his eyelids dip and—

“Mike!” Holly ripped open the sliding glass back door and her voice sent the two flying away from each other, a jolt of electricity surging between them. “Chief Hopper called and El has to go home for dinner!”

Mike glared at Holly fruitlessly, who smiled and waved at Eleven, totally unaware, a single front tooth missing and pigtails bobbing up and down.

El stood up and Mike walked her to her bike in complete silence, his mind turning over and over, trying to think of something—anything—to say. She wrapped a leg around the bike frame and settled on the seat, fingers running through the white streamers. Her cheeks and lips were red still, her big brown eyes on the pavement below.

“Uh...” Mike murmured stupidly. Her eyes found Mike's, who stood a few feet away up on the sidewalk.

Fiercely, El swung her leg back around kicked the bike stand back down. She stomped over to Mike. Eleven took him by the shoulders and laid her lips on his sun-dotted cheek, like she had seen Nancy do a number of times to Jonathan Byers. His eyes grew wide.

“Bye Mike,” she said confidently, a frizzy curl blowing past her eyes in the breeze. She climbed back onto her pink bike and kicked at the kickstand all in one motion. “See you later!”

She pedaled away and Mike stood watching, mouth hanging open. “See ya,” he waved dumbly as she sped down the road.

Shoving himself off the quarry still sounded reasonable.

Author's Note:

SO I need more ideas! Message me with any headcanons you've seen and liked or just something you've wanted to see someone write about! I might not do you justice, but I'll try my gosh darn best. Keep leaving comments, they MAKE ME SO HAPPY :) Also, I want to write some more featuring El in her telekinetic glory but I'm lacking inspiration at the moment. Again, hit my inbox up with ideas! I'm begging!

-Rosy